The Anarchist Black Cross Federation

Who are we? What do we do and why?

What is the Anarchist Black Cross?

The origins of the ABC date back prior to the Russian Revolution (1917). It was originally formed as the Anarchist Red Cross in Tsarist Russia, to organize aid for Political Prisoners and their families as well as organizing self-defense against political raids by the Cossack army. During the Russian Civil War, its name changed to the Anarchist Black Cross to avoid confusion with the International Red Cross, also organizing relief in the country. It has continued, at times very sporadically, serving its purpose of organizing aid for Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War (PP/POW's) for the last 7 decades.

In the 80's, the ABC began to grow and for the first time a group of anarchists started an ABC group in North America. In the United States, the ABC name has been kept alive by a number of completely autonomous groups scattered throughout the country and has grown to support a wide variety of prison issues.

What is the ABCF?

In May of 1995, a small group of ABC collectives merged into a Federation whose aim was to focus on the overall support and defense of PP/POW's.

Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War are not in prison for committing social "crimes," nor are they criminals. Different PP/POW's participated in progressive and revolutionary movements in varying levels. Some on educational and community organizing, others in clandestine armed and offensive people's armies. All are in prison as a result of conscious political action, for building resistance, building and leading movements and revolution... for making change.

Many of us in some way or another are part of these very movements, part of that resistance that PP/POW's helped to build. As people continuing to struggle for change, we are obligated, and it is our duty to support those people who are in prison as a result of struggling to make change.

Though some have a wider definition of Political Prisoners,

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we maintain that even if the definition of a Political Prisoner was expanded to include social prisoners of conscience and widely accepted, it needs to be clear that those prisoners who went to prison as a result of political action taken on the street would still demand our priority support. For movements to support other prisoners before we are supporting the prisoners who have gone to prison for building the very movements we now participate in is backwards and criminal.

How do we support Political Prisoners & Prisoners of War?

Making sure PP/POW's are a part of their own support is crucial and one of the greatest strengths of the Federation. We directly communicate with as many PP/POW's as we can. A large part of this communication is working together with them to find out what they need and how the members of the Federation can practically provide this support. A Prisoners' Committee made up of 5 PP/POW's who have shown the most interest in the Federations work and helping it grow give guidance, propose work and vote on work proposals made by other PP/POW's, and Federation groups. Members of the Prisoners' Committee (PC) rotate yearly.

Letting people know about PP/POW's and the urgency of defending them is the first step in building support. In this capacity organizing community support to meet the needs of our communities is one of the best way to do so. During their free food program, Jacksonville ABC- BG discuss PP/POW's with their community and hands PP/POW information out for free. We also produce information about PP/POW's, the struggles they came from and the movements they represent. Booklets, fliers, video/audio tapes, T/sweat shirts and calendars are produced featuring these prisoners. This not only informs people about their existence and daily struggles behind bars, (where they continue the struggle), as well as heightening their visibility in our communi-

ties, but funds from this merchandise, when we sell it, is sent to those prisoners.

Which leads to another important responsibility of supporting PP/POW's. Raising material support is crucial. It is not uncommon to find that Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War are left with no financial support to pay for phone calls or postage stamps to communicate with their families, friends and supporters. Not enough money to pay for a news subscription, or buy books. No funds to get proper footwear or summer/winter clothing. If we call these prisoners our comrades, we can not allow this to continue. And we don't.

We do so in part through the Warchest Program. Through the Warchest, we collect monthly donations from our own ABC groups and monthly or one time pledges from other ABC's around the country, supportive groups, and individuals. With these funds, we send out monthly checks of up to $60 to those PP/POW's who are receiving the least financial support to our knowledge.

Still, financial support and communication are but two forms of direct support needed to demonstrate to their keepers PP/POW's have not been forgotten. As enemies of the state, Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War serve the hardest time. The government often attempts to lock them far away from their families, friends and supporters. We must not allow them to be isolated. When geographically possible we go into the prisons and visit PP/POW's. This also brings the harsh reality of political imprisonment much closer to supporters. It reminds us that PP/POW's are not only names and figures, pictures on our T-shirts and leaflets, but people with personalities and personal needs. And if we forget this or neglect to include it in our work to defend them, our foundations will soon become weak. ***Contact us to be involved!***

Neil of NJ ABC and PP Herman Bell

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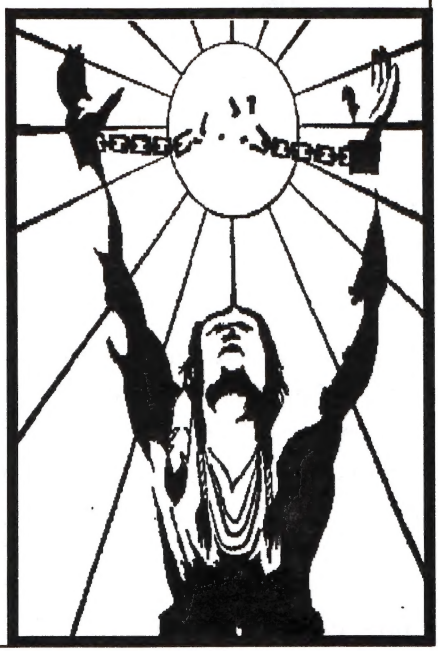
Free All Political Prisoners & Prisoners of War